

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR SIGMUND FREUD

PROFESSOR SIGMUND FREUD died in London on September 23, 1939, at the age of 83, after a long and painful illness. He was born in Moravia in 1856, but from the age of four he lived in Vienna until 1938, when, after the annexation of Austria by Germany, he found refuge in England. He studied medicine in Vienna and at first his interests lay in the field of cerebral anatomy and physiology. The various branches of medicine proper, apart from psychiatry, had no attraction for him and after a short period of study under Charcot in Paris, he settled down in 1886 as a specialist in nervous disorders. Abandoning the treatment of organic nervous diseases he confined his work to the treatment of the neuroses. At first his principal instrument of work, apart from haphazard and unsystematic psycho-therapeutic methods, was hypnotic suggestion. From the first he used hypnotism not only as a means of giving therapeutic suggestions but also for questioning the patient about the origin of his symptoms. The value of this procedure he had learnt from Dr Josef Breuer, a Viennese physician, and its further extension by Freud led in the end to the development of the methods of Psycho-analysis in which hypnotism is not used.

The momentous nature of Freud's discoveries might have been suspected from the storm of opposition and obloquy which they encountered on first being disclosed ; and nothing in Freud's life-history is more impressive than the courage and persistence with which he devoted himself to work which was not only unappreciated by his fellow physicians but was derided by the greater part of the world. Only after more than ten years of solitary work did his teaching begin to get a hearing among psychologists. Then gradually a small band of pupils from other countries, attracted by his teaching, gathered around him in Vienna and in time helped to spread a knowledge of his doctrines throughout the world.

The first noticeable recognition of Freud's work by academic psychology was an invitation from Professor Stanley Hall to deliver a course of lectures on Psycho-analysis at Clark University in the United States. Freud was greatly heartened by his reception in America. "In Europe," he said, "I felt as though I were despised; but over there I found myself received by the foremost men as an equal."

Interest in psycho-analysis was greatly stimulated by the War of 1914-1918, for during its course psychologists and medical men were forced to admit the part played by mental factors in the production and treatment of war neuroses. Since those days acknowledgment and understanding of Freud's work have steadily increased and at the present time it is recognized throughout the world as the most important contribution to psychology and to therapeutics that has ever been made by one man. And it is not only in these two spheres that its effects are seen. There is no department of knowledge related to man's life and behaviour that has not been influenced by Freud's teaching.

Freud was a corresponding member of our Society and contributed to *Proceedings* a paper entitled a "Note on the Unconscious in Psycho-analysis". It was indeed in his prolonged researches on the unconscious that his work approached most closely to the interests of Psychical Research. He was at all times sceptical of alleged supernormal phenomena but he appeared to have an open mind on the possibility of the occurrence of telepathy. At the end of a paper on "Dreams and Telepathy" written in 1922, he said: "Have I given you the impression that I am secretly inclined to support the reality of telepathy in the occult sense? If so, I should very much regret that it is so difficult to avoid giving such an impression. In reality, however, I was anxious to be strictly impartial, I have every reason to be so, for I have no opinion; I know nothing about it."

Such a statement is entirely in keeping with Freud's attitude towards all judgments of belief or unbelief. Some of his own discoveries were at first sight as unbelievable as those of psychical research and the advice he gave to the detractors of Psycho-analysis is equally applicable to the critics of Psychical Research: "If owing to ignorance of the subject you are not in a position to adjudicate, then you should neither believe nor reject . . . no one has a right to conviction on these matters who has not worked at the subject for many years, as I have, and has not himself experienced the same new and astonishing discoveries."

Those who knew Professor Freud best are at one in their judgment that he was not only a great psychologist but also that he was a

great man. His undeviating search for truth in spite of all opposition and opprobrium has never been surpassed in the history of science. His equanimity under neglect and misrepresentation, his serenity under trial and affliction, his bearing under cruelty and injustice, are the marks of a truly great man.

T. W. M.